

B. Social Role

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769 The principal social function of the family in China was the bearing, rearing, and training of children. Sons were more highly valued than daughters, because only the former remained with the family after marriage, contributing to its labor and income, and only sons could perpetuate the family and perform the yearly rites in honor of the father and the family ancestors after the father's death. Implicit in the ceremony was the idea that the ancestors had a life after death, watched over the family's fortune, and were comforted by the periodic ministrations of the family. For the living, the rites provided an occasion for awe and respect during which the continuity of the family over time was re-emphasized and the solidarity and duties of the family unit in the present reasserted.

The veneration of ancestors was so important to Chinese society that the absence of sons to carry on the yearly observances was regarded as a major failing on the responsible male's part and a tremendous catastrophe for the family. Concubinage and adoption were socially and legally sanctioned as means of providing sons, if marriage produced only daughters or no children at all. Because of the necessity of providing against a high death rate, the premium on sons resulted in over-population, only partly offset by a high rate of female infanticide.

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596 Just as sex, age, and generation determined an individual's status within the family, so did

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561 these factors determine his behavior and position
• 554 in the community and the world at large. An
596 additional determinant of his standing was the
status of his family in society.

562 Authority and dominance were the province
554 of the males. Women might, and occasionally
did, exercise overt leadership. More frequent-
ly, they were the power behind the throne. Such
cases were exceptional, however. In modern
times, at least, supremacy was neither desired
by women nor readily admitted to when possessed.

561 Age was honored relatively and absolute-
554 ly. Long life automatically gave its possessor
higher standing in the community, but whatever age
he attained, he was to show respect to his elders
and members of an older generation. In the
society of traditional China, age implied the
accumulation of wisdom and experience vital
to society in times of decision or crisis.

555 Individual status also improved with ed-
596 ucation, more particularly with the attainment
554 of a degree in the official examinations and
appointment to official position. An individual's
educational or official career was usually de-
pendent on the willingness and ability of the
family to support him during a long period of
study. A particularly promising youngster of
a poor family might occasionally be underwritten
by the clan or village. Whatever his means of
financial support, his success in the exams was
a reflection of proper upbringing and honored
his family and, to a lesser extent, his clan and

553 village almost as much as himself. The wealth
554 usually accumulated by an official during his
596 career also materially enhanced the village and
clan as well as the family. For these reasons,
reflected glory accrued to the kin of an illustrious
scholar or official for generations after his death.

C. Political Role

577 To a remarkable extent, the Chinese imperial
596 system operated by moral suasion with a mini-
642 mum use of force and without a developed, codi-
fied system of law. This achievement was made
possible through the state's utilization of the
family as a training ground for loyalty to the state
and the virtues prized by it as part of the machin-
ery of government. The root virtue of filial piety
was extolled above all others in the Confucian
system. It denoted not only the obedience and
devotion of the son to his father but of the younger
to the elder, and of the subject to the ruler.

618 Two types of organizations built on the
foundation of the family were utilized by the state
in maintaining peace and uniformity throughout the
empire. One was the clan, or tsu. It bound to-
gether families with a common ancestor to promote
their security and advancement. Relying for
strength on the maximizing and formalizing of
kinship ties, the tsu reinforced the authority of
the family head and the values he imparted to
the younger generation. The tsu settled disputes
between families, conducted ancestor rites for

577 decision, speaking about [the error] in allusions
668 in order to preserve harmony and unity.... "64

577 The Communists single out for public recog-
668 nition individuals who have ruthlessly battered
554 their way toward one of the Communist goals with
utter disregard for "face," their own or others'.
They praise children who have denounced their
father, which, in older China, would have been
condemned as utter destruction of the family's
"face." Communist writings indicate that the old-
er attitudes have been hard to overcome. Liu
Shao-ch'i is fulminating against them when he says
"Any idea of trying to avoid inner-Party struggle,
or of refraining from criticizing others' mistakes
so that they will not criticize one's own errors,
is utterly wrong." 65 Obviously the universal
"struggle meetings" for personal criticism and
self-criticism in the presence of the group are
destructive of the old feeling for "face." Indeed
the leadership may regard them as one of the
principal devices for the complete elimination of
this traditional attitude.

64. Mao Tse-tung, "In Opposition to Liberalism," written in 1937, translation in Compton, op.cit., pp. 184-85.

65. Liu Shao-ch'i, "On Inner-Party Struggle
Current Background, No. 105, Aug. 5, 1951, p. 5.